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Mexico City

Olive Percival

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Of
American Women Writers

1650-1920

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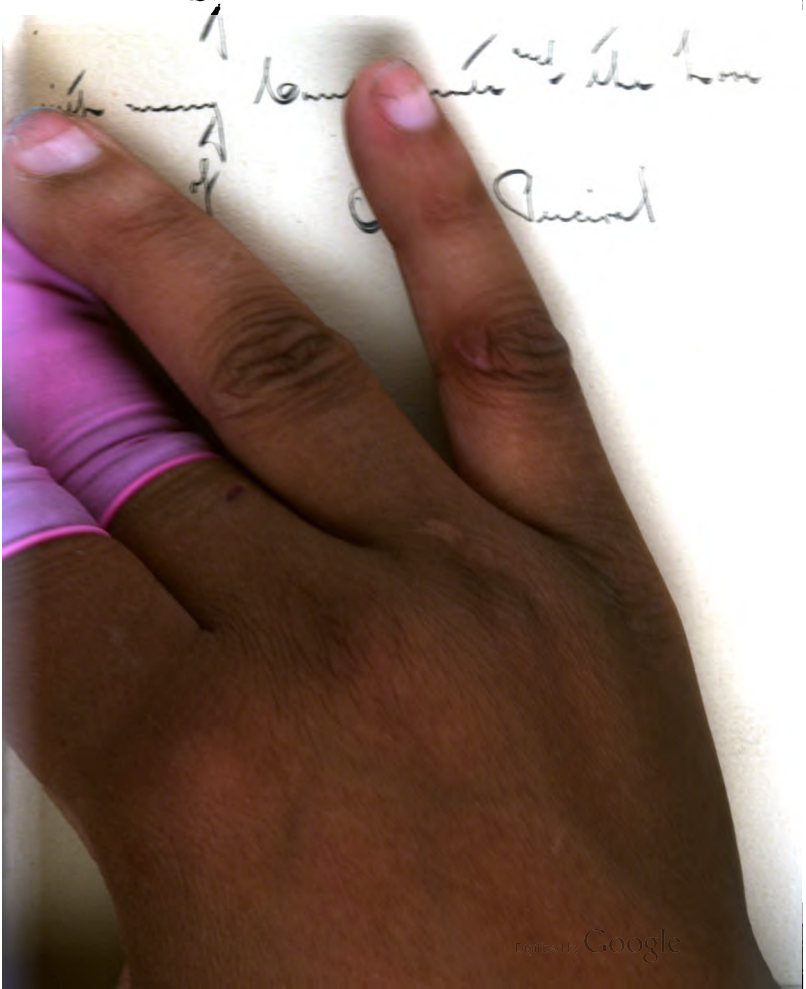

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Mexico City
An Idler's Note-Book

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Natives

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Mexico City

An Idler's Note-Book

BY

OLIVE PERCIVAL

Herbert S. Stone and Company
Eldridge Court, Chicago
MDCCCCI

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TO

MR. G. C. HOLLOWAY

IN MEMORY OF A FRIENDSHIP
OF THE WORK-A-DAY WORLD

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FOREWORD

Such a lot of people have spent the day in Mexico and have then written books about it.

My pre-determination was to be original. But now that I am come back, I too would lay down a little wreath—not of stiff, magnificent facts and information — merely of tender words of appreciation and an intimate, if forceless, sympathy for some of those strange phases of Life in the Land of the Noontide Calm.

OLIVE PERCIVAL.

Los Angeles, California,
January 1, 1901.

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First Impressions

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An Idler's Note-Book

MEXICO CITY

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I knew very well how the old, old City of Mexico was going to impress me.

There would be splendid churches, with long, glittering religious processions. There would be acres of century-old palaces, with musicianers by the palm-shaded fountains and loungers in purple and silver. Every front

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yard would be an enchanting tangle of aloes and cactus and orchids and chocolate trees.

In every balcony there was sure to be a pretty maiden, with a fan and a mantilla and a big comb of real shell in her blue-black hair.

In the street below, a masculine affinity.

He, I dreamed, would be tall and lightning-eyed, — with a sugar-loaf hat, a zarape, a cigarette—he might have his guitar.

And there would be duennas somewhere and monks in gray and bull-fighters in scarlet and tinsel. There would be gayly-costumed poor people —not many, and all light-hearted, I hoped. They would, I presumed, be drinking goblets of foamy chocolate

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or weaving garlands of flowers with which to decorate their water-jars.

There might be a few gorgeous brigands, with embroidered jackets and silver spurs a-jangle. And (who could tell?) there might be a political revolution!

Of course I could not be quite sure of everything, although my hopes were reasonably modern; and, as a latter-day pilgrim, I really must expect one or two refining disappointments. Yet there was one thing of which I was entirely confident. I knew that my first view of all those dazzling, enrapturing landscape arrangements would be under the bluest-blue sky and in a blinding white sunshine.

Therefore, as we rushed through

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blue-green fields of pulque-plants, dotted thickly with pre-historic ruins and with ancient churches newly whitewashed and with sky-blue rain-pools, I preparatively twirled a pair of black eye-glasses.

But alack-a-day! travelers encounter all the unusual bits of weather, and we landed in Mexico City (which for long years I had loved even as I had adored the ancient and wonderful city of Baghdad) in company with a rain-storm.

Now this was disheartening, it was nearly tragic. I had saved particular and high degrees of enthusiasm for that one first moment —and, as a legitimate redress, I desired to postpone my first impressions until another day. But Fate

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was unrelenting. The little clip of her merciless old shears sounded unwarrantably spiteful. I wanted to call aloud.

Nevertheless, as we drove up into the city (with our cabman crying, "Sh! sh! sh!" to the horses, as though they were hens), the beautiful law of compensation was everywhere in evidence. The crooked old streets were veritable pictures.

Not dazzlingly Oriental, to be sure, as they ought to have been, but of the French Impressionist School,—all muddy grays and browns, with streaks of purple shadow and splashes of dull pink and yellow. Some of the by-ways, where drainage was an impossibility, were very good bits of Venice without the

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gondolas; in the courts of many of the houses were little lagoons; and any one of the palatial old convent buildings, facing or backing upon those narrow and gloomy streets, would have been quite good enough for a doge or a Desdemona.

The narrow sidewalks were covered with a fine, even pudding of bad-smelling mud; the street-car mules and drivers were plastered with it and persistently avoided the sympathetic eye. The mules seemed particularly self-conscious.

But all at once there was no rain —not one drop—a glorious Mexican sun was shining and the little lakes in the inner courts of the houses were mirrors with charming reflections. The sun lit up the mossy

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tiles of the splendid old church domes; it made beautiful shadows in the deep doorways and under the balconies of the yellow and pink stucco houses; it brought out the fragrance of the strange flowers in the courts, brilliant glimpses of which were permitted through medieval entrances, as the carriage poked along. Everything was so delightfully clean and fresh and beautiful —everything except the Mexic smell.

The theatric streets were crowded with people, but oh! such astonishingly poor creatures and sorrowful eyed! They were unspeakably depressing. And where could they all be going?

It was not a feast-day, it was too early for a bull-fight; I was certain

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there had been a fire or a parade—possibly a big free-silver rally. But in due time it was discovered that the congested condition of those streets was normal—that it took Sunday markets and certain of the feast-days to bring out the real crowds of Mexico!

On the muddied sidewalk, with their bare feet in the gutter, here an there sat a family of well-to-do peons—clothed all in white and eating a combination breakfast and supper of tortillas with chili-sauce from a wonderful pottery dish. To a newly-arrived gringo, that pottery dish and the light in the eyes of the brown little children were indeed fascinating.

Driving slowly along and staring

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out in a dazed way bordering on the state of enchantment, I was restored to acute consciousness by the sight of a poor little peon staggering along the slippery cobbles with a perfectly immense American trunk on his back.

The wretched little son of Issachar, it was ascertained, carried dreadful trunks like that from the depot of the Mexican Central to the hotel, a distance of about one mile and a half, and up two flights, for exactly twenty-five cents, Mex. Oh! it was horribly unjust, it was outrageous—and I was at once and for the first time intensely interested in socialism, labor-unions, anarchy! For if that little beast of burden with an immortal soul should

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slip and fall, he would be crushed, horribly crushed. And all for an amount not exceeding twelve pieces of copper.

I sat aghast—such a very little peon and such a very big trunk! I trembled, and was chill with anxiety. I yearned for relative human justice. I—Oh! may the saints of his parish forgive me! That trunk was my very own.

At last, the carriage stopped in front of the hotel.

It was a new one on May the Fifth Street, dating only from the time of the Emperor Maximilian and named for a great and brave man, Comonfort. He dealt the death-blow to the church as a governing power in the State. (That sounds

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so much more feasible than is warrantable. It becomes irksome, I am sure, even to a great man like Comonfort, to live in the midst of assassins known and unknown.) Of course it was to be regretted that this hotel was not a century or two old, like most of the others—and that it had not been a palace or a convent of the inquisition. But then, it was near the great cathedral and the famous old plaza; it was not far from the alameda, and every immediate prospect therefrom was lavish in the matter of mossy church-domes and towers. Ah! on the other side of that portal with the big iron knocker—in that balconied yet somber-looking building, would I find my first home in

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Mexico! Was I to be poisoned in my *chocolatl?* Or stabbed under the left shoulder-blade some moonless evening, as I walked along the corridor?

There wasn't any riot of tropical plants in the patio—it was bare and clean. That was a distinct disappointment. But, it was explained, an esteemed patron of the establishment (An American, to be sure) had, after an argument extending over a number of years, induced the management to dispense with the garden of plants in the court—and its mosquitoes. This explanation should have pacified me; I should have generously refused to cultivate the deep regret that I did not precede that particular reform

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and the general introduction of electric lights and telegrams and bicycles. And especially since I got there ahead of telephones and automobiles!

But, I penitently confess, I always regretted that patio. It was so tidy and unromantic.

The furniture was old and Frenchy —some of it may once have belonged to Carlotta herself, but no one seemed certain about that. And then there were actually two old brass candlesticks on the writing-desk. I at once realized that everything was to be perfectly ideal. No gas, no lamps, no electric-buttons—just a long, green bell-cord with a tassel, such as there used to be in all the dear old English

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novels. Think of the romantic thrill to be experienced, when I should find it necessary to "ring for candles"—just as the terribly haughty Lady Clarinda did, or the rector's gentle daughter!

My admiration was extreme for those little old candlesticks and their short, fat tapers. It was a pleasure of many sentiments to write letters by their soft and yellow light to persons up in the prosaic States. Such are rare moments; you lose perfectly your identity—you are an enthusiastic composite of ever so many Revolutionary granddames and early-English and ante-bellum heroines.

But, oh! the moral battle I did fight during my few weeks' associa-

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tion with those old candlesticks! I can lift up my head, I can even speak of them calmly now—for I really didn't steal them. They are down there yet,—presuming that the next American tourist did not carry them off as souvenirs.

Never, until I knew the old *administrador*, did I suspect the capacity for even a latent esteem for a hotel-clerk; nor had I dreamed that the American-made linen duster was especially designed by an æsthetic fate to be worn constantly by a big, Romanesque Mexican. His slow, sad smile was a fascination—Mr. Henry Miller himself could not have improved on that. Nor on his beautiful, baritone and almost reverential, "*Buenos dias, señorita.*"

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The *administrador*, on the occasion when I stepped fearfully toward the key-board in the office, did not think to embarass me with any of the long and occult remarks not included in my handbook of the Spanish language. There was merely the regulation greeting of the country, with innumerable stately bows and lordly edicts to the vassals in waiting to clear the way—to follow after with my umbrella, my camera and the few armfuls of old Mexican junk, whose possession made my heart sing for joy, but at which they, poor things, looked almost with scorn.

And then there was such an interesting chambermaid. His name was Mariano, and he was a beautiful

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character; but he was so extremely plain in the matter of features that it saddened one to gaze upon him, if a refuter of some of Mr. Darwin's theories.

My one great ambition in Mexico was not to get an audience with Diaz, the uncrowned emperor, but to have the memory of Mariano's face perpetuated in a door-knocker to bring back to the States. I never expect to see a Japanese grotesque with a visage half so fascinating in its ugliness. To be sure, I spoke the language (learned it going down on the train), and so I was the one regularly chosen to find fault and to order the breakfast, which was brought in from a restaurant by the little mozo. He would, in re-

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sponse to a jerk on that romantic bell-cord, rush in with a humble, mournful, "*Buenos dias, señorita,*" and stand awkwardly with his little toil-worn hands at position rest. It was noticed that he always rushed out politely screening a wide smile that exploded into unmistakable giggles—a trifle uncomplimentary to my Spanish, which may have resembled but remotely the pure Castilian. Very likely, I should have hurled one of the candlesticks at Mariano's head, but Americans are stupid about servants.

May the most generous of the saints reward the patient little drudge —may Mariano live many years when his enemies are dead!

He broke hand-mirrors, he giggled

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(but quite involuntarily) at my collection of old key-plates and door-keys; but he never stole a thing, not even the reddest of neckties.

The *azotea*, or flat roof, of the hotel, reached by the darkest and shakiest corkscrew stairway (I searched in vain for a trap-door and a secret panel), was the place to spend a moonlight evening.

Just the place to wrap up in a Spanish cloak, exactly nine yards wide, and to listen to the low thrum of a guitar and the singing of gay old ballads of love and war. (And one there was who deemed it fit and proper that an American in the present year of grace should suggest occasional refrains of "Ha! ha! ha! Yankee Doodle Dandy!")

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And then, as you thought how many old Spanish lords and ladies were dead and turned to clay all around you, how agreeably sad and effective in the quiet night were "The Spanish Cavalier" and "La Paloma" and "In Old Madrid." But, if your American pride was particularly rampant and you chose to be less sentimental and to take a mental leap back to only 1846-47, you sang the high-keyed songs your grandmother sang, when your grandfather came marching home from Cerro Gordo. And, possibly, another —the strangely fashionable ditty of to-day whose title has been translated into the polite phrasing of the country, as "It Will Be Very Warm in the City This Evening."

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Then, too, leaning over the parapet, the *azotea* is just the place for dreaming of those old, old days when Cortes marched along the causeways, the Aztecs tossing down flowers from just such a roof.

That phase of the dream is less disquieting than the next—when, down upon the heads of those amazing adventurers, the same Aztecs hurled stones and blazing arrows. Oh! thrilling and very romantic is the history of the ancient city of Tenochtitlan! What tiresome, unforgivable iconoclasts are they who would destroy our faith in the story of the conquest according to Prescott.

Where those twin towers of the old Cathedral rise in the moonlight

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once stood the great pyramid and temple to *Mexitl*, the war-god of the Aztecs, daily bespattered with human blood. I am near enough to have heard the wild chant of the red-handed priests and the shriek of the victim, as his quivering heart was skillfully torn from his breast, an offering to a hideous stone image. I am almost near enough to have heard Cortes haranguing his discontented men, or poor Montezuma addressing his nobles from the parapet of his palace-prison. Ah! on this little *azotea*, one could dream a whole star-lit night away and never slumber.

What one does hear is the clatter of the cabs over the cobbles below —and the occasional shout of some

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high-hatted Jehu, muffled in his zarape. Then, from near-by barracks, come "Taps" and "Lights Out."

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In the Streets of the City

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IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY

An expression of thanks is really due Mr. Hernando Cortes for having established in Mexico a certain valuable precedent.

Whenever it was insinuated that he could not do such and such a thing, or whenever it was presumptuously stated that he must not go to a certain place, that praiseworthy and industrious gentleman straightway did that thing and made a bee-line for that point.

So, when an American resident of Mexico City told me in an ominous sort of way that I must not go on

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the street without a chaperone or a gentleman escort—and when he announced that I could not go alone to The Thieves' Market district, I in my heart muttered several perverse things. Also I remembered my Prescott and finally sallied forth —alone.

What girl of the nineteenth century, with the dignity of America in her keeping, is going to conform to an old unwritten law of some other country and one never framed for her kind? And, too, when her time is limited? Foolhardiness is not exactly commendable, even in a Yankee; but Mexico is the best policed city on the continent, and I had no pockets—for years and years past, I had had no pockets. What

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A Street Scene

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was there to fear? It is only the disdainful foreigner with nose aloft who finds the disagreeables.

Sometimes chaperones insist upon frittering away immensely valuable time in easy chairs in the hotel parlor. But had I journeyed to Mexico for the one excitement of counting and recounting dreary figures in the wall-hanging? Was my acquaintance with one of the enchanting cities of the world to be limited to a balcony view and an occasional "personally conducted" promenade?

Alas! I had discovered disadvantages in masculine escorts. Not all of them are satisfactorily civil when you are pleased to stop short and stare at things not in the guide-

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book, the stupid guide-book; or when you desire to scrape acquaintance with some dirty little beggar or an interesting old dulce-woman.

Such painful revelations in a strange land finally induced me to defend and to sympathize with myself.

Yet, with all the bravery of my argument and my convictions, I usually left the hotel on my solitary tramps quite unceremoniously. But my returnings therefrom were openly triumphant—unkidnapped, unpickpocketed and laden with priceless memorabilia in the way of old handwrought iron and blue crockery and brass candlesticks and rosaries with big, pendant medals.

That radiant hour was not the proper one to confess that many

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times I got lost in those streets that changed their names every block and that the policemen's directions were in Spanish far too rapid to be of assistance to one of my understanding and pride.

There would have been no justice in complaining that I was much stared at by the inhabitants, for I stared so much longer at them; and then, too, they were always good enough to explain to each other that I, a strange being, was an American, and that explains much in Mexico. I was discreet, being in the minority—I admired openly, but I veiled any astonishment at things unconventional from my little point of view. Once, once only, in my solitary ramblings, I found just

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cause for alarm, and that was when, in a wretched street and on the narrowest of pavements, I unexpectedly met a beggar. He was evil-looking and drunk with pulque. But lo! he immediately flattened himself against the building, with a polite, "Pass on, young lady," and did not push me into the horrid mud-puddle of the street as I had so greatly feared.

No one was ever rude, and many were friendly. I never repented my imitation of the Cortes method of seeing the country.

And so it came to pass that I lodged under a roof and generally ate expensive food—but I forgot the pattern of the wall-hanging and I lived in the streets of the city.

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Not so very far away from the glittering shops of San Francisco Street, and very near the famous Alameda and Paseo de la Reforma, you will find the city's poor. Not all of them, but enough and in conditions so deplorable that a person of keen sympathies speculates as to the possibility of ever smiling again in this life while the memory of that poverty shall endure.

It is the hideous variety that knows no hope.

But it is a pleasure to walk without haste and to study the buildings as, in the day when they were new, men builded so well. I stand and look long and rapturously.

They are principally old convents, gloomy and damp, converted into

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tiny shops and over-crowded tenements; the walls soft grays and yellows, with deep windows irregularly placed and of varied forms. Then there are always little surprises,—a niche high up near the cornice with an old weather-worn statue, or a unique door-knocker or balcony-rail, or a bit of splendid ornament over a window—sometimes two richly-carved doors, fit for an Old-World palace.

Yes, one block in perspective of any of those narrow, old streets would drive an artist paint mad. The poor Slave of the Camera merely wails and loathes himself and his art.

All this is the effective background for certain picturesque types of humanity. Humanity in rags is

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so extremely picturesque. It is frequently hungry and sullen, too. Very likely, one would not pity the poor of Mexico City so much, were they inclined to be a trifle socialistic; but in their eyes you see only the unresented suffering of centuries, —a hopelessness not to be forgotten.

When you walk delightedly in some magnificent garden, such as a millionaire Spaniard knew how to beautify and maintain; when you are supping at some grand old villa at Tacubaya; when you are marveling at the splendor of the interior decorations of a dozen near-by churches; —then unpleasing flashes of recollection will obtrude themselves, and you are sure to have an uncomfortable moment or two, if you trouble

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to contrast the magnificence and the misery of Mexico City.

There on the pavement sits a village woman rolling a cigarette. Nine brass rings with settings of glass decorate just four of her slim, brown fingers.

But was it so very, very long ago that, to many of us, all that was magnificent and desirable in the way of jewels was represented by a prize-box ring, with its bit of ruby or sapphire glass on top? The years have improved our taste in Art, but they have taken away the superb content of childhood. So there is no depreciation in our smile for the Aztec woman with the charming rings and the little girl's heart.

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Her half-naked son, under an umbrella-like hat, stands behind her and timidly clutches her gown. They have lugged a stock of pottery to market,—four water-jugs and a small basket of glazed green and brown mugs. For some of their things they may get twelve cents—maybe only five. Prices in Mexican markets are quite as uncertain as the favor of a politician.

One young man, of perhaps eleven, thinks it ridiculous to photograph old worm-eaten doors and balconies. He gives a little whoop to attract my attention, takes off his hat with a "See me, young lady," and charitably allows me to get his likeness. He is of the generation that will

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favor gringoes and their cameras and their railroads.

High-hatted country gentlemen, barefooted, with bell-shaped trousers fitting like a mousquetaire glove, and with gorgeous zarapes over their shoulders, file past. A quiet, serious procession until they get into one of those little shops where, back of the counter, you see such a fascinating array of blue and white bowls,—and where the sour smell is superlative. That's a *pulqueria*, a Mexican saloon.

The fat old señora sitting in that pink doorway is a dulce-seller, her last patron was that soft-eyed, very brown girl in a chemise and ragged

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petticoat only. Every one eats *dulces* (sweets) in Mexico, so I recklessly squander three cents with the lady. It is my nineteenth experiment in the Mexican *dulce* line, few of which I regret—none of which I confess to my fastidious friend of the American Colony. The native crystallizes nearly everything edible. Crystallized squash and sweet potato are offered to you in long, clear bars—resembling in appearance a high grade of glycerine soap. Then there are sweets made of milk and of pecan nuts and of cocoanut and of tuna-juice and of spices—of everything nice except chocolate—which is a disappointment, after reading such a lot of books about the Aztecs and their *choclatl*.

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I desire to file a protest somewhere when, in the most unexpected old corner I discover a very picturesque native selling American chewing-gum and nile-green gum-drops. How immeasurably sad are such innovations! Why doesn't he sell pines or alligator pears? Or opals and corals? Why does he grin and pause, expectant, for a Yankee's look of approval?

Women with babies tied on their backs with their rebozos stop and gossip vivaciously.

The babies are thin and sad-eyed little things, pitiably silent. Negatively, you learn to be glad that Aztec families are small, that the death-rate in Mexico City is second to Constantinople only.

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It is delightful to see two grown-up men meet and embrace after the fashion of the country. They rush melodramatically into each other's arms, each throws his right arm around the other and delightedly pats him on the left shoulder-blade, while he kisses him enthusiastically on both cheeks. It is worth being nearly run down by a cab, witnessing this *custom de la pais;* it is really difficult to refrain from applause.

The lottery-ticket venders, old and young, male and female, are ubiquitous and persistent. Lotteries in Mexico are government institutions, and eminently respectable. But I virtuously save my coppers for ex-

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periments in ices and *dulces* and *limonadas*.

How can I believe in lotteries and raffles, when I always draw blanks?

Then there are men with flat baskets of fruit on their heads, pushing through the crowds and shrieking as though in an agony, their tenor voices thick with tears. What a relief to learn they are only crying, "Grapes! grapes!"

That slim, brown woman in white cotton chemise, neutral petticoat and blue rebozo closely drawn, looks as though her proper background would be a sphinx and a pyramid, with a camel and a palm-tree. She is very

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Egyptianesque. But, instead of a water-jar on her head, she has a pulque-jug in her hand, and her destination is the *pulqueria* under the sign of The Pearly Portal.

There in the gutter stands a young man of about fifteen, eating a *taco* (which is a fried turn-over, filled with chopped, highly-seasoned meats—I once purchashed one in a briefly seductive cook-shop) and chatting with a pretty little girl, of perhaps twelve, with a baby on her hip. The little girl is his wife, according to another ancient unwritten law of Mexico, and that baby is his son and heir. It makes my conscience heavy to stop within range of their affectionate chatter and to

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photograph her with that pretty love-light in her young eyes. How happy they are—yet are they both bare-footed and but moderately clean; and his dinner of one *taco* she carries to him in the street! Is happiness accidental?

It is not edifying to stop and gape at the poverty of these people in the tenements — huddled together in one small, dark room—damp and unventilated, bare of all furnishings except a tortilla-board, a charcoal-dish and some pottery jugs and bowls. How can they keep warm, or well, or clean or good? Youths, maidens, men, women, old people, babies, — diseased and otherwise. Privacy in the home and morality

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as revealed to us are, perforce, unknown. They do not theorize, their lives know so many tragedies in the struggle for primitive creature-comforts. Ah! one feels constrained to write them all down in a big "book of pity and of death."

Such, alas! is the present state of many of the children of the mighty Montezuma's warriors! A brave, patient, capable people — in their own land and hopeless!

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The Alameda and Chapultepec

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THE ALAMEDA AND CHAPULTEPEC

I had always listened with uncertain patience and no enthusiasm to the extravagant praises of other people regarding The Alameda of Mexico City.

Undoubtedly, in its way, The Alameda was a charming little park, but we had parks at home in the United States, and I had seen most of the big ones. I knew it was unsafe to walk even at high noon through The Alameda, for fear of robbers and kidnappers, who would hold you for ransom—sending slices of your ears to insure

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expedition on the part of your friends. But that was twenty-five years ago—there were no bandits there now. Why should I rhapsodize?

That was before I had explored The Alameda and had walked through that delightsome place from corner to corner. Afterward, whenever it looked like rain and my friends became concerned about me, they went direct to The Alameda.

The guide-book will tell you that it is a park of about forty acres, and that the grandees of Mexico walk and drive there when the band plays. All of which is as dry as dust to one who confesses to the spell of Mexic enchantment that binds even an unwilling American, the moment the musicianers begin

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to pipe under that turquoise sky and in the tender gloom of the mighty trees that arch high, high above you in The Alameda.

I suppose there were wonderfully rare plants in the tropical tangle along those broad, curving walks; I suppose all those fountains cost mines of money; I suppose some of those people were the multi-millionaires of Mexico.

But of course I did not notice such things—hardly flower-boys and dulce-women—until the music stopped.

Mexican music in Mexico is so seductive, so full of subtle, minor harmonies; you feel impelled to weep your life away to the strains of it.

Wagner tires — sublimity always

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brings weariness, and the flawless beauty of your favorite sonatas and nocturnes sometimes cloys. It really is, as Lamartine has said, pathos alone that is infallible in art.

But of course you don't cry—fine poetic frenzies are not so expressed nowadays; it would look merely like hysteria. So, under the awning of the principal promenade, you sit up very straight indeed (as an American girl should, in a country where most of the women are round-shouldered); and, with that enravishing music in your ears, you stare disappointedly at the fashionable world of Mexico in Paris and Vienna hats and gowns. The foreign ministers and the American Colony also kindly pass in review before you.

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One of your companions knows them all and gives you the reasons accepted by an interested public for the permanent residence in Mexico of some of the Colony.

But very soon, all this procession —with its setting of tropic plants and trees, with the green gloom thereof for a lime-light and the Mexican band for an orchestra—resolves itself into just one of those big spectacular dramas: a troop of clever mummers, a little dash of society business,—expensively staged, wearisome—and a sorrowful lot of tragedians yearning to play light comedy.

You do not throw your ten-cent bouquet of exquisite roses and forget-me-nots into the midst of them, for the music ceases suddenly, and

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you are speedily restored to an every-day frame of mind.

Then you begin to notice things in a rational way.

The poor people, too, were in evidence there in The Alameda—they are always with you in Mexico.

They stood in silent groups, far from the parade of fashion, and listened solemnly to the music. The men, in trousers and blouses of white cotton, with shabby, high-crowned hats and with their small feet in pitiable excuses for sandals, —were the impressively calm and dignified figures of all that crowd.

But, alack-a-day! the zarapes over their shoulders were not the richly-colored, hand-woven little blankets I had hoped to get by the dozen.

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They were generally American factory productions, quite too lively in coloring for even a sleigh-robe; as table or couch covers, they were simply impossible—one could never live in the same house with such color combinations.

Oh! if all the aniline dyes in the world were only at the bottom of the polar sea!

The prettiest drive in Mexico City is out to Chapultepec Hill. The road leading thereto, bordered with trees and opening at the end of The Alameda, was built by the order of Carlotta; once it was called The Mad Woman's as well as The Empress' Drive. And that wasn't so very long ago, yet to-day it is

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known only as the Paseo de la Reforma, one of the beautiful drives of the world.

At the beginning of the Paseo is a big old bronze statue of Charles IV, once said to be one of the two finest equestrian statues; so I tried to like it. But the tail of the horse is too long and it mars the effect from three sides—and then the figure itself flatters Charles (I never did like him) so unreasonably. That portrait of his in the National Museum may have momentarily disturbed the self-complacency of his majesty. Whoever he was, the painter was a daring realist.

At the end of the Paseo is the solitary hill—the royal hill—of Cha-

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pultepec, with a castle and a palace for a crown. Montezuma's most splendid residence was there — at least we chose to believe that it was—and there before him had lived his magnificent ancestors, maybe. In that day, the waters of Lake Tezcuco plashed at the base of the hill, but the lake has rippled away forever, and to-day soldiers of the Mexican republic stand there on guard.

The road winds and winds up the hill, between ancient and mighty trees, with a delightsome undergrowth of ferns and vines and many sorts of unfamiliar greenery. It was easy to remember Montezuma and Maximilian in the gloom of those cypresses, bearded with Span-

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ish moss, and to ponder on the events of the past five or six hundred years, witnessed by those rocks and by those gnarled old trees.

But it wasn't cheerful. It made me much gayer, comparatively, to look straight up that steep, steep hillside and to think how brave Scott's men were to even attempt to climb it that morning in September, '47. But of course they got to the top, a little historical fact that I recall with proper satisfaction on several occasions while in Mexico.

The President of the Mexican republic (one of the mighty men of the last century-end) was then at the Palace of Chapultepec. This was a very great inconvenience to us, but no one else seemed to mind,

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and so we had to be magnanimous and make a pretence of being content with seeing the old castle, now a military college.

I had seen the Maximilian silver in the museum and all the other relics—I had hoped to see the very rooms of the palace where poor Carlotta had lived that famous chapter of her sadly unique life. But I didn't.

Our permit to see Chapultepec, a tiny card from the National Palace and bedight with yards and yards of military red tape, was in the course of time delivered into the hands of a young and good-looking lieutenant of artillery—who could, we joyously discovered, speak intelligible English to four ladies at once.

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, He showed us through scientific-smelling class-rooms and through mess-rooms and dormitories and armories and gymnasia.

It was all very progressive and very dull.

By the time we reached the library, it was lined to the frieze with books bound in russia of the bravest scarlet, we were glad to rest. It is just possible that regular sight-seeing is as fatiguing as shopping or scrubbing or golf.

So, quite unmindful of the Jehu and his hire on the other side of the big gates, we were listlessly looking at ambitious drawings by Mexican cadets and military books with colored pictures in them when, with no premonition whatever, we

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made the important discovery that our guide and lieutenant, a Spanish-Mexican, could joke in English. In idiomatic English! To be sure, we had to pay strict attention and we had to laugh encouragingly during all the pauses; but, ethnologically, it was extremely interesting.

After a time our prodigy got down the list to that tiresome joke about the standing army of the United States of America. Fancy having to listen to that alleged joke—under the roof of Chapultepec Castle and in the year 1899! And to the statement that Americans were just a lot of prize-fighters and football-players!

It was a dreadful shock—to one just from the States and posted

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on war-news up to within a fortnight.

But then it had been catalogued as a joke and was an old favorite in high circles in Europe; therefore I promptly laughed — faintly. In Mexico it isn't lady-like to contradict—so I merely requested the Lieutenant to admit that we put up a pretty good game; when I felt stronger I ventured to inquire if there had been a really good bull-fight in town lately. And then we all laughed and the tension lessened.

Then we looked at more picture-books, and we made fun of the French and of the Germans, and we became very good international friends indeed. Out in the court-yard, at the foot of a statue I per-

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sisted in believing was a little compliment to George Washington, the lieutenant favored us with an example of the American volunteer at drill.

It wasn't so particularly funny but we laughed politely; for didn't we know that once upon a time General Winfield Scott took a few volunteers quite as awkward on a tour through Mexico? And they really did nicely.

Had the lieutenant ever heard about that? Or about a ship called "The Maine"? And a Yankee by the name of "Dewey"?

The panorama of the great Valley of Mexico, as seen from Chapultepec Hill, is said to be the finest in the world. It may be; but,

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minus its associative charm, I could name two landscapes in Southern California as worthy rivals. We stood there near the parapet and looked away—away—and thought of many things, including the advisability of our lingering until twilight in some shady by-path that we might meet the ghost of Marina.

I didn't think much about Montezuma or Maximilian; I dreamed dreams about Carlotta and her jewels and her balls and her fêtes. How magnificent her dinner-table must have looked, decked in all that silver now in the museum. Poor Carlotta! The wife of a barefooted peon was happier; she was just a queen, with wealth and power and a crown of sorrow.

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And then I wondered what Juarez gave Seward for breakfast that time when he was the guest of the new Mexican republic. I hope his chocolate was not as thick as mud with sugar and cinnamon.

At the big gates of the castle, at the beginning of a charming flower-garden blue with myosotis, we said our farewells to the lieutenant. He had spoken our own language; he had, in an unexpected fashion, broken the monotony of sight-seeing. We were particularly and forever obliged to him. Then as we began to back out at the gates, still bowing and exchanging compliments and regrets, he gave unto each of us as a remembrancer

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a lovely brass button of the artillery. Who would have dreamed of finding such a thoughtful and strictly up-to-date soldier in old Chapultepec Castle, Mexico?

It is said (and it is going to take long years to live down the reputation) that American tourists take flower-gardens, or paving-stones, or wall-decorations—anything not chained—as souvenirs. Perhaps that is why the lieutenant and his subaltern, with lifted caps, stood at the gates and watched us until a turn in the road hid the carriage.

He made an effective picture, with that castle and palace and so much history behind him.

How did he ever dare to be light-hearted?

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Days of peace, long life to our acquaintance of a little summer hour! And long live the Mexican Army!

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To the Floating Gardens of Tenochtitlan

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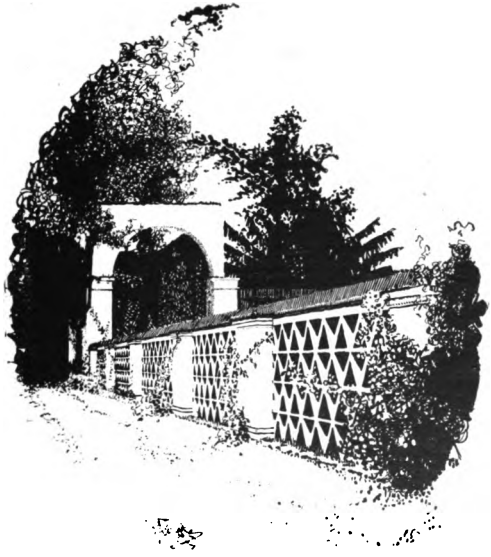

At a Mexican Country-house

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TO THE FLOATING GARDENS OF TENOCHTITLAN

Of course they don't float nowaday—it was very disappointing. Is there one thing left for the modern pilgrim to discover, aside from the fact that he arrived on this spinning planet quite too late to see anything worth while?

Everywhere the guide and the guide-book and the oldest inhabitant conspire against your enthusiasm, gloomily assuring you that this and that are hardly worth looking at now; they are not what they once were. No, indeed! You come too late!

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It is discouraging, but it is not worth wrangling about.

The better way is to assume the look apologetic, and, while the little fox of vexation gnaws and gnaws, to show everybody how amiable and how appreciative of trifles such an unreasonably tardy traveler can be. Try the other plan—be supercilious or become a party to their depreciation, disparaging all you see and bragging about what you have seen elsewhere, and you will promptly meet with disaster.

He is unworthy the cockled hat, the pilgrim shoon, who cannot smile and look enthusiastic in all languages; he should travel only through the medium of books, by his own little fireside.

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So we sweetly gave ear to the regulation lament and apology for the weather, the time of year and the era itself, and, discovering that in this instance we were only a few hundred years and exactly seven months too late, we resignedly agreed to squander an afternoon in seeing the Floating Gardens that had ceased to float, and sundry other things, presumably not in the least worth while.

Our boatman is, oh! such a sad-eyed, suddenly-smiling boy of about thirteen; our boat sufficiently primitive to delight the most unreasonable of antiquarians. Now I can tell a bark from a brig, and a brig from a brigantine (that is, if it is at the end of the summer and the

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coach has been patient), yet I cannot demonstrate the difference between a gondola and this Aztec canoe; neither can I make plain the resemblance, yet there is a resemblance.

And the very same thing in boats, be it known, was in vogue long before the Aztec oracles mentioned the Conquerors.

It is very beautiful to look along this narrow ribbon of water, brocaded with the wavy reflection of the tall, slim trees along the banks. But there are moments of anxiety. You have no craving for death in foreign parts and in a canal—yet that very fate seems inevitable, the stream is so crowded with market-

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boats and pleasure-boats and house-boats—all gliding silently and very swiftly down with the current to the city. The boatmen stand in front, unconcerned, immovable; it is not until the last instant that our little man gives a skillful lateral push with his pole and annihilation is averted.

It isn't lovely, but it is necessary to flatten one's self on the bottom of the boat when we come to these low, stone bridges, the like of which I haven't seen for years and then inside an old drawing-book. The boy propels us under by pushing scientifically on the mossy stones of the arch with the soles of his bare feet, as he lies on the flat of his back in the bottom of the boat.

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Everything under the Mexican sun pertaining to the Viga Canal is distractingly picturesque. I think of all the clever paintings I have seen of Venice and Holland and China and wonder why, as an inspiration, the Viga is not equal to any of them.

Here comes a pleasure-boat of young men and maidens, gay with the Mexican colors, for only two days have passed since the birthday of President Diaz. They stop their song to laugh at the prospect of crashing into our humble, undecorated little craft—and I hastily review the rules for resuscitation after drowning. On they come, nearer, nearer and more swiftly; but the boatmen of the Viga are really to

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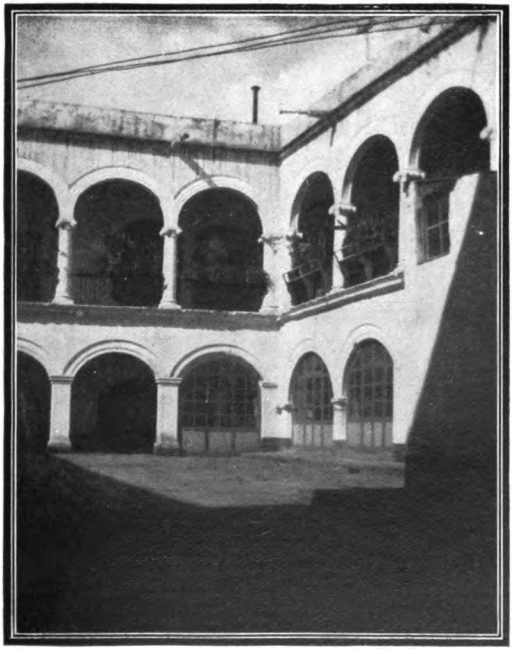

SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW

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be relied upon—at the last fraction of the last minute. So another collision is averted.

Oh! if I wink just once some detail of the constantly changing picture is sure to be lost. If I look at that long, narrow vegetable-boat—it must be a hundred feet long — piled with such dreadfully commonplace but delightfully colored things as cabbages and radishes and pumpkin-blossoms and beets and lettuce, I am sure to miss the picture of that snowy-robed woman walking along the bank with a water-jug on her head; or of those two barefooted, laughing young lovers, sauntering along on the other bank, hand in hand, and stopping occasionally for him to kiss her smooth, brown cheeks.

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Very probably, the great Cortes looked upon all these things when, as Montezuma's unwelcome and unsnubbable guest, he rode along this causeway, noting with astonishment the animation of the Viga. It was an old, old waterway even then. Possibly the great canal of China is no older.

We are following in the wake of some empty flower-boats returning from the city markets. The barefooted, high-hatted men are pushing the big, clumsy things upstream, shouting occasionally to acquaintances taking a holiday along the banks. It's beautiful to see these peons evince an individuality, and somehow it's surprising.

A little hamlet of pink and white

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stucco houses, charmingly mirrored in the sluggish gray water,—then our boat glides along through a tangle of water-weeds and past a fringe of willows, right into a swarm of little bathers.

Their clothes must be on the bank somewhere, but, unmindful, they stand in the shallow water and frankly stare at us just as the cherubs in the art gallery did.

Down in Mexico one so frequently chances upon animate bronzes bereft of drapery and pedestal and catalogue number. I recall a certain admirable piece, not an antique, that was discovered one afternoon in a dim street of an out-of-the-way village. I did not overtake him, but in that little back was shown in-

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comparable grace of movement. And, too, such beauty of form and modeling! Ah, yes! it was quite plain from that unknown piece of Mexican bronze that even Donatello himself could be surpassed.

We stop at some tiny villages to see the old churches and a sad, lichen-spotted chapel. What indefatigable church-builders those early Spaniards were! Did it make them easier of conscience? They of this generation have been good,—they have not removed the ancient landmarks which their forefathers did set, but alas! many of them they have defaced with whitewash, an accursed sky-blue whitewash! It is dreadful but pitiable.

At Santa Anita we take a canoe

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for the Floating Gardens. Gondolas and Spanish galleons and Chinese junks and birch-bark canoes are all perfectly delightful to dream about, but one should know intimately the canoe of these chinampas. Such a dear little boat, such a trim, slim little arrow of a boat—about two feet by eighteen, I think; and then there are two statuesque boatmen, zaraped, high-hatted and barefooted, to stand at either end and push us about the Gardens.

Dear! dear! It will never do to confess disappointment at finding the famous old Floating Gardens of Tenochtitlan to be mere plats of green, with flowers and trees and vegetables,—and just separated by strips of water like irrigation-ditches

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and along which our little boat is pushed!

Of course I hadn't expected the Gardens to float, but I had expected them to be top-heavy with gorgeous tropical flowers and thickets of palm-trees and clumps of tree-ferns with parrots in them.

Or maybe just a cactus, with an eagle aloft and a snake—a very, very little one!

I am not content with pulling daisies and the lilac-colored "lily of the country," as we squeeze in between the little old gardens—many of them, alas! planted to horrid cabbages. I am not content, even when one of the boatmen lands and picks bits of crimson and pink which verily prove to be wild poppies.

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My shattered illusions might magnanimously be forgotten did he heap the canoe with those exquisite silken things. But he brings only a careless handful.

Then the other boatman nonchalantly pulls a lily-bud with a yard of stem. He turns his back, he touches it with his magic brown fingers, and presto! he holds before us a beautiful, beautiful necklace like unto one of clear jade beads—with an ivory lily-bud for a pendant.

On gala-days hundreds and hundreds of years ago, so reads the story, the maids of Aztec Land bound wreaths of poppies about their dark tresses—and, around their necks, they wore wonderful neck-

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laces exactly like this one our boatman has made so cleverly. Oh! is it to be mine? I am mute with apprehension as he silently hands it to the Chief Escort; my heart refuses to beat until the Chaperone has declined to wear the slimy thing—then I am proud to rescue it from the bottom of the boat and to drop it ecstatically over my head and about my neck. The famous emeralds of Cortes could make me no happier.

Now am I enabled to shake off the mental malaria and to see appreciatively the beauty of these romantic old chinampas, as we push in and about them until the sun sets.

Some one confesses a thirst, so

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we land and pulque is brought to us in charming, highly-glazed brown pots. There are bold strokes of red and orange on the western sky, and against it are silhouetted the tall and slender water-beeches. It is the tranquil hour of day, the hour for serious meditation,—so I sit apart and wonder about many things beyond the sunset.

And why on earth I (the daughter of a line of sturdy pie-eaters) cannot manage to drink pretty, pink pulque! But I can't! I can't! Even when I nearly forget its odor.

Then I begin a desperate flirtation with a dear little maiden of four. She lives in a hut of rushes on the edge of the stream, and her dark eyes are deep and trustful and

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her gurgle of laughter is very enjoyable music.

We walk on, past primitive houses and primitive man. The girls of the village are grouped effectively in the plazuelas. So extremely picturesque are they, with their costumes differing only in color, that one presently believes the chorus of an opera has strayed hither.

Nothing seems real, due of course to the magic necklace. Not even the supper we have in a bower, in front of one of the little rush huts, and where a barefooted lady (attired in a blue skirt and a white chemise, with a very pink neck-fixing) serves us pulque and pink, sweet tomales. Likewise little bunches of minnows, wrapped in cornhusks and roasted in

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the ashes and served cold—very cold indeed. The Chief Escort politely expresses a preference for warm minnows, and is sweetly assured by the hostess that hot fish is injurious.

Then two musicians come and bow themselves into our bower and play the most dreamy, melancholy things on the *harpo* and *bandolin*. And then all the relatives and friends and neighbors of our hostess softly come and wedge themselves in and about the arbor; and a very, very big Mexican, with a high look and his face shadowed by an enormous hat (he must be the swell of the village) comes and silently blockades the flowery doorway.

No one speaks, not even when the musicians rest; there is no sound

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but the distant cry of the boatmen and of children at play in the twilight. A white moon comes up and sheds a theatric sort of light, and the sorrowful-eyed musicianers play soft, strange airs that enable one to see and think most extraordinary things.

But very abruptly the spell ended. I did not lose the magic necklace, neither did I break it; thus it happened.

In a moment most shockingly abstracted, it seems I made use of such a phrase as, "Good night, boatman,"—and very properly the exceeding great wrath of the Chief Escort was straightway upon me and I was obliged to at once wake up

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and to identify myself with the nineteenth century. It would have been in unquestioned good taste, had I merely sworn at the man—I would have been a high-bred lady, I would. But to have addressed him, a boatman, civilly—*Caramba!*

I promptly hated the Chief Escort, and I counted forty-three times very inaccurately. And I was busy for a long time after that, thanking God for having been born an American with a contempt for such a thing as caste.

But it was such a rude and such an inartistic awakening! And the spirit of the Aztec princesses had permanently fled; I could not, on the long, long way back into the city, conjure up the consciousness

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of even one ordinary Indian maid with a poppy wreath on her head. And then it began to rain drearily, and I was—homesick!

Oh! such little bits of things make or mar a day, or a life. I have forgiven the Chief Escort, but I shall forget to forget.

In the heat and light of the candles the magic necklace quickly faded, and I hung it, mourning, on a peg above the writing-desk. It was a charming and a refined fancy of some pagan æsthete wandering about the Floating Gardens in the long ago. It was an heirloom of the ages. And as such I prized it.

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Early Mass and the Flower Market

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EARLY MASS AND THE FLOWER MARKET

Life, we are told, is full of grievous hardships. I chanced upon one of them down in Mexico.

Getting up before day and dressing "by yellow candle-light" reads sweetly—Stevenson's child probably enjoyed it; but the reality in a cellar-like hotel, before the mozo and the chocolate-maker are up, is no motive for a lyric. It constitutes the hardship referred to. So, while the Chaperone snores rhythmically (confident that when she does choose to awake, the mozo with

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her chocolate will be at the door; while night hangs upon my eyes and I am in the very middle of an interesting dream), I dress and stealthily hurry forth through the echoing corridors of the hotel into the raw, gray day. For I am going to early mass in the old cathedral, —afterward to the flower market.

To be sure, I could go at another and a more rational hour, but then I would not see the dulce-girls and the street-sweeper and the pickpocket and the cutthroat—nor any of their friends. I shall not know them all, I fear, but they are sure to be there at early mass; I shall see the submerged two-thirds of Mexico at their devotions.

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It will be different, very different, from that ceremony of yesterday in the San Domingo Cathedral. (What if that aristocratic old fane could be induced to tell what it knows about the Inquisition for the Repression of Heresy?) Mrs. Diaz was there—all the Spanish-Mexican nabobs were there,—in silk attire and ablaze with gems.

It was very beautiful. The walls of the cathedral were hung with ruby silk-velvet, from the rich gilding of the frieze to the wainscot line; candles twinkled on a score of altars and blazed in constellations overhead; the rich vestments of the priests were heavy with gold embroidery; the images were crowned and hedged about with regular hot-

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house flowers; and the music was an inspiration to high thinking for a week.

But perfect ceremonies like that are for the edification of Mexico's rich and mighty—and for friends of the American Consul-General; the hungry poor do not need such beautiful theatrics—they are content to slip into the church and hurriedly say their little prayer alone.

Such a gray and dreary morning! The chill and the damp penetrate like stilettos—no one in sight, not even a lottery-ticket vender.

Ah! there goes a barefooted laborer in dirty white cottons; his zarape is so badly worn and he looks frozen—but he does not shiver. He wears his entire wardrobe, and

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NEAR THE FLOWER MARKET

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it would not make him warm to shiver or to grumble. (I can philosophize at this cheerless, matutinal hour, but my teeth will chatter traitorously.) He hurries along, with a haughty air and a handful of cold tortillas. He, too, is going to very early mass.

We enter in at the splendidly-carved doors of the Sagrario, the big seventeenth-century chapel once used only for marriages, christenings and funerals, and from which the crucifix and holy-water were carried to the dying in a wonderful gilded chariot; at its approach even a viceroy had to kneel—perhaps in the mud. Of course you do not see the Procession of the Holy Wafer in these days, and this magnificent old

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church is now the property of the Mexican government.

The style of the Sagrario may be architecturally vicious—it is a trifle heavy with ornament. But Time has done much in his inimitable way; he has subdued the gold of the marvelously-wrought carvings within, which when new must have quite blinded the eye of him who looked.

I am not too soon—already, in the faint light of the early morning, the bare floor of the great chapel is dark with kneeling worshipers.

My laboring-man carefully places his tortillas and his hat on the floor and kneels afar off. Near him is a black-robed woman telling her beads in a fashion most picturesquely de-

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vout; with her face shadowed that way by her rebozo, her head is a very good likeness of the Stabat Mater.

Ah! there are some young friends of mine — dulce-girls every one. They are very pretty in their faded pinks and blues, and their charming little smiles of recognition almost induce me to believe that the sun is up and a-shining outside.

These figures prostrate before that dusty old side-altar seem to have a common grief; the man wears mourning.

A lottery-woman bows her head down to the cold pavement. Her tickets make a big bulge in her blue rebozo. Maybe she prays for good luck this day.

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Leaning near one of the big stone pillars is a barefooted Indian; his white cotton blouse is horrid with blood-stains, yet he is no murderer —only a butcher-boy. He fidgets with his shabby hat; he certainly has a woe, but who will comfort him?

A charming young lady in black bows low to the principal altar and glides out, drawing closely her head-covering. She is as sweetly and fragilely beautiful as a Bougereau virgin.

I tiptoe past a pottery merchant whose wares are forgotten on the pavement at his side; past a sleepy boy with a tray of magenta tunas; and past a sorrowful-faced old woman with two baskets of yellow pumpkin

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blossoms. People will buy them and boil them for "greens."

Then I pick my way through kneeling groups of stern-faced men, wrapped to the chin in their zarapes, their unreadable eyes on the priests; they might be images in tinted bisque so motionless are they against that cold white background. Oo-oo-oo! I do not like to look at them! They do not pray—they just gaze straight ahead, in such an intense and incomprehensible way. The poor things look really very wicked!

For a moment I rest at the end of an ancient wooden settee and by the side of a blind old beggar. His poor body is misshapen with age and with rheumatism, but his unbeautiful face is illumined with love

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and faith, as he listens to the service. He, alone, in all that throng, looks thoroughly happy and hopeful.

Then, through rows of women telling their beads, but with their eyes following me curiously, I pass by the side-altar (where a young priest is reading the service from an old book delightfully rubricated) and into the cathedral proper.

At its entrance I stand humbly, very humbly, and look down the nave—up into the dome. Gloomy and magnificent,—vast, sublime! The echo of a footfall seems a profanation.

I suddenly realize that I am praying.

And there is the famed high-altar

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and the marvelous choir-rail with its superb candelabra, not yet melted down by the Mexican government. Despoiled again and again and again, yet this old cathedral founded by Cortes is still splendid with paintings and rare marbles; it is still beautiful with the gleam of silver and gold and fine brass and polished onyx. For it was the costliest church ever built on the western continent.

But such magnificence I can appreciate only in an infantile way at such an early hour—I will find the Murillo and come again in the afternoon.

What, I wonder, is the disquieting sin of that ragged little man kneeling so abjectly at the great

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Altar of Pardon! What a restless eye and bad mouth!

Our Blessed Lady of Guadalupe appears to be the best-beloved; the candles on her altars seem always to be lighted and the railing hung with the freshest flowers. Over at her hillside shrine in Guadalupe where, in the third vision, she appeared to the Indian, the walls are covered with the most curious imaginable little paintings,—representing all sorts of catastrophes which were happily averted, through her influence, from the individuals who gratefully hung up those votive memorials.

The beggars who ask alms in the name of the Virgin of Guadalupe may well be a sanguine lot.

Under one of these side-altars,

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they say, are buried the heads of many Mexican patriots, and somewhere in one of these side-chapels reposes the Emperor Iturbide. Under this lofty roof and with much glittering pomp, those fated two, Maximilian and Carlotta, were crowned with crowns that brought such brief power and so much grief.

Just outside the door of the sacristy stands a splendidly-carved old confessional, quite guiltless of varnish and curiously worm-eaten. My admiration is noted by the old sacristan. He comes and he bows and with a princely wave of the hand, he gives me permission to inspect the sacristy of the great cathedral, which I find behind two more seventeenth-century doors, won-

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derfully carved. I shudder as I pass in, lest the brown, satiny wood of those dear old doors soon be "restored" by applications of "fillers" and paints and varnish.

The tiny altar-boys, in cheerful scarlet robes, are buzzing about, and an old, old priest (such a fine and gentle face!) is making himself ready for the next mass—and with a deliberation absolutely restful. The three chat softly and affectionately.

My presence is unnoted and I wander about, staring at the amazing paintings spread over the walls and ceiling (and which I hope some day to have forgotten), trying vainly not to covet the splendid old mahogany chests of drawers extending around the great room. How ideal in their

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Street Sweeper

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simplicity are the brass pulls thereof, and, too, how eloquent of their ancient origin!

I very well know that all those drawers are crammed with folded vestments and altar-cloths heavy with gold and silver thread and beautiful with splashes of old posies such as never grew in any earthly garden. I further realize that I shall never own even a patch of all those brocades—that I shall probably never even see one of those altar-cloths. But with as resigned as possible a countenance, I thank the pleasant little sacristan for the pleasure of having seen the dreadful paintings (why should he suspect the chests of drawers are worth looking at?) and hurry out into the nave of the

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dim old cathedral, echoing now with the footfalls of many newly-arrived worshipers. They look a more cheerful lot—doubtless they have all breakfasted. But where is that Murillo?

I cannot detect the old master among so many of his talented pupils —and then it is so very dark in the little alcoves. I search in vain up and down both those great aisles. Why don't they have it placarded? And, oh! if I could only again locate the man with all those lovely tortillas!

But it's now for the Flower Market, in the very shadow of the Cathedral on the west and fringed about with parrot-venders and strawberry-women.

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The flower-boys are just effectively spreading their really gigantic wreaths of daisies and pansies and arranging in bunches great masses of blue and yellow and red. And such quantities of white flowers, too—enough for the bridal of all the earth.

These modern Aztecs show a fine appreciation of color and who would have expected it, in the remnant of a race so long enslaved and down-trodden! Many of the flowers are packed in the stiff, conventional French fashion—very pretty indeed on a Dresden plate or a wall-hanging—and which these imitative people probably learned in Carlotta's time. But they have their own pretty little tricks. Rosebuds, as you wait,

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are made into full-blown roses; they paint the gardenia, likewise the water-lily, a charming cerise red; and I suspect they throw perfume on their violets.

Oh! only a wooden image could resist all these impassioned entreaties, these sweet blandishments of tone and glance of the Mexican flower-seller. A French milliner would be stricken dumb with envy.

An animate statue of bronze in white cottons (not too white) begs you so mellifluously, so tragically, to buy a gardenia set daintily about with myosotis and fringed with violets. You glance twice at the little fellow, so he becomes a persistent shadow; you must buy then, or run away.

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"What value?" "Ten cents, young lady." But you turn to the old woman with the cherry-colored lilies and, with a comic little grimace, the dramatic flower-boy immediately thrusts the ten-cent gardenia into your hand for three cents.

Your heart may be beating wildly, but you assume indifference and get that armful of forget-me-nots for eighteen cents.

If you enthuse openly over those flawless American Beauties, the exorbitant price of eight cents each will be yours to pay.

Oh! if things in Mexico were strictly one price only, what a heaven it would be for the enthusiast! As it is, you learn to deceive and dissemble and dissimulate—you return

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to the States with that New England conscience of yours in a perfectly unrecognizable condition, if you bring it back at all.

What a sweet bewilderment to sight and smell is this flower market! And was there ever a more enravishing perfume than the composite of violets and gardenias and Mexican strawberries? You are certainly intoxicated, and you buy in the most reckless gringo fashion. All the flower boys have discovered you now, and they rush at you and thrust dazzling nosegays into your eyes and under your nose and quite deafen you with their entreaties to buy.

But you manage to center your admiration (the apparent waning of

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which influences the market-price) upon a cluster of superb orchids.

"Lady! lady! fifty cents." You lift your eyebrows in counterfeit amazement.

"Beautiful aroma, twenty-five cents, young lady! twenty-five cents!" You shrug your shoulders.

"Eighteen cents! eighteen cents! eighteen cents! little lady!"

But their picturesqueness, their caressing tones and honorific diminutives—and their bargains—do not annihilate the fact that some loose change must be saved for to-day's pottery and *dulcès*.

Nevertheless, I consider with seriousness the purchase of one of their giant wreaths of daisies, with a big cluster of gardenias and white roses

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nodding at the top; it is only two dollars, Mex. The trouble is, it is quite too grand to present to an individual in the private walks of life, even in Mexico; Teddy Roosevelt lives at such an inconvenient distance; I have no friend in the American cemetery.

But then—I love daisies quite as much as Eric Mackay ever could, and there really might be a wonderful pleasure in the possession of a garland of flowers about four feet in diameter! There might be a—but no! I simply cannot afford to squander the price of so many lovely water-bottles or of that big, persimmon-colored crucifix down in the Thieves' Market, on my room decorations.

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Therefore do I sigh, turning away mine eyes slowly and remembering Lot's wife.

Then, dragging myself away from those gorgeous heaps of flowers flaunting in the dark-blue shadow of the market—and compelling myself past even the soft-voiced strawberry-women—I betake myself and my floral burdens out into the pale, early sunshine and back to the hotel.

That was the memorable morning I ate even the thick slab of indifferent sweet-cake that, in Mexico, comes to you with your morning chocolate under the beguiling name of *pan Inglés*.

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At a Mexican Country-House

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AT A MEXICAN COUNTRY-HOUSE

The day before, under the blazing sun of Teotihuacan, I had climbed the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon; that day, breakfastless, I had gone to the Merced Market and the famously beautiful old church of La Santísima; I had afterward tramped, quite luncheonless, all over and around the hillside shrines of Our Blessed Lady at Guadalupe, and had accumulated in her market-places a mozo-load of pottery for friends in the States.

These simple facts produced not merely an under-languaged enthusiasm but a mighty hunger and an

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inordinate longing for a rest-cure. The hunger, I can now see, was foreordained. Not, indeed, that I might look with rapture and enforced resignation upon a Mexican banquet but that one gringo might sit down and eat thereof and arise triumphant with digestion not permanently impaired.

It was in the late afternoon of that busy, that dreadfully happy day, that I reached the hotel and was told that the special car for the S—— minister's ball left the Zocalo within one little hour. I was dismayed. There was no margin for a siesta nor for a pilgrimage to a restaurant—there was hardly time for a bath and a bromo-seltzer. It was a very unlovely moment.

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We crammed some of our fixings into a party-bag, we made perfectly frantic haste and we succeeded in just missing that car *Especial*. But ere we had slain ourselves, before we were even well started in lamentations, our generous American friend (he remained cosily at home and read a musty book by Bernal Diaz) donated the trifling sum of twenty dollars for our car-fare, and we four were soon jolting along toward the country-house of the S—— minister, in a private street-car of our very own.

It was raining when we reached the village of our destination, an ancient and picturesque one, about fifteen miles out from the capital city. The cobbled and grass-grown

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streets wound artistically between high stone walls, over which drooped branches of strange trees, dripping in the noiseless rain.

We were not so very, very merry as we groped along. The great darkness and the silence seemed ominous.

There were big lanterns (three, to be accurate, and swinging from massive iron brackets above the entrances to secluded villas) that threw pale yellow rays down the black and glistening streets; but they created fantastic shadows and only momentarily dispelled the fear of lurking brigands in long cloaks, with gleaming daggers. Those two dark, muttering figures just in advance of us —were they prisoners and assassins? The setting of the scene was not

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reassuring. And the narrow street twisted on and on and away into the darkness and without any sounds of revelry, without any Japanese lanterns. We were very dull and very, very tired. Could we reasonably expect to discover a party anywhere along that ancient B. C.-looking street?

But at last and before our gowns were quite crushed and limp, we arrived. This fact, evolved so tediously (perhaps years had really passed since we left the lights of the Zocalo!) was announced through the medium of a big iron knocker.

Journeying by rail and by stage-coach and by canoe and by mule are unique experiences, but it is the arrival that in Mexico is so partic-

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ularly charming. The dogs and the servants (they live in the rooms next to the big entrance) are all so frankly glad to see you—and the host and his family hurry to assure you, over and over, not of your welcome merely but of your ownership of everything in sight. Then the maids and their children and their grandchildren all look after your comfort in such an enthusiastic and such a gratifying way. And then they all stand around admiringly.

Your identity may have shrunken pitifully on the journey, but the Mexican welcome is a compensation for all the trials and wearinesses, and you gradually expand and radiate sufficiently for a personage two times as eminent.

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We were too late for the dinner and the amateur theatrics that preceded the ball, but (and I thanked my stars!) we were in good time for the supper.

Ah me! Thirty hours, I soliloquized, and Fate had given me but two little red bananas, some mere dots of pink sweet-cakes (the girl mixed the dough in a queer bowl and baked them over a tiny charcoal fire, while I stood and admired) and a mouthful of chalybeate water over at the sacred well of Our Lady—plus two bromo-seltzers while dressing for the ball.

This would have been niggardly, had it not been positively munificent. The nasty chalybeate water made it munificent as, taken internally, one

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drop of that liquid is equivalent to a sight-draft on the future for another trip to Mexico. But, perversely enough, this consoling fact was not revealed to me until a fortnight had elapsed.

So, when the procession formed for the supper-rooms on the other side of the big patio, and a Mexican young man in powdered wig and eighteenth century regimentals (he had been helping dance a minuet) entreated me to honor him with my company thither, I could have danced or have wept with delight. But I only smiled and tried not to look ravenous.

This country place of the S—— minister's was thoroughly charming, even on a black night and in a

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dreary rain. Two centuries and more ago it was the property of a Spanish marquis, the gentleman who planned the pleasure-garden which, on that wet and moonless evening of the ball, we were not permitted to see.

Of course the villa rambled in the approved Mexic style all around four sides of the patio, or paved inner court, beautified with rare trees and flowers and festoonings of delicate vines. And a stroll along the corridor on two sides of the big patio brought us to the supper-rooms, which were lofty, Frenchified apartments, softly lighted with candles and echoing with merry small-talk in several languages.

The long table, with its candelabra, its superb roses, its disquieting

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array of tall bottles and unfamiliar viands—and, too, with all those un-American faces opposite, seemed like nothing but a French print. Nothing seemed distinctly real, as I sank into my chair, except my very individual hunger.

At my right was a Mexican gentleman whose English unaided by an interpreter was limited to an interrogative "No" and a variety of bows; next him was the hostess —she spoke everything modern except English, she detested English. Plainly, the Fates had decreed that I should eat and be silent.

But on my left there was discovered a Spanish lady who knew six good American adjectives and two nouns; and, as I could boast scores

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of Spanish adjectives and exclamatives, together with a few nouns and a verb or two, we became greatly attached to each other during the progress of that feast. Even if I did, in my anxiety to be at home in Spanish, confusedly garnish it with school-girl German and kindergarten French, it all passed for high English. (I have sighed for a phonographic record of the conversation; it would successfully divert me, and mine enemies, even on the longest, dreariest day.)

Chemically speaking, a Mexican party-supper is supposed to be equal to the sum total of several stupendous things—the first rarebit of the boarding-school miss, plus amateur pineapple fritters and hot pie for

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breakfast, plus tripe and wedding-cake for supper. It would seriously upset the digestion of a cassowary, certainly of any gringo that ever came to the republic unless preceded by something like a thirty-hour fast. There were, I distinctly remember, twelve sorts of meat, eight *dulces*, one salad and many, many wines—not one of the *dulces* was an old acquaintance.

But I lost count of the other experiments. Many of them, though spiced and decorated very mysteriously, I bravely essayed and regretted not—that evening. And I privately congratulated myself on my accumulated hunger—without it, I might have been considered provincial and supercilious.

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My Spanish neighbor was properly charmed with an American who could eat appreciatively of her favorite dishes. (Our taste in jokes may have been seriously different.) And I kept thinking of the Moor who, in my Third Reader, ate a peach with a stranger and therefore remained his true friend, even when he learned his only son had been killed by him. This was irrelevant, but it interested me.

The menu was quite elaborate enough, yet, after a little while, I forgot my manners and whispered to a maid for a glass of water.

Alas! the lordly host heard of my heresy in some way and promptly came to learn whether I were ill or his wines not pleasing. My prefer-

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ence for distilled water (and of which in that great establishment there was less than one quart) was, in Mexico, quite incomprehensible. So I divined I had disgraced myself and my godmother and had annoyed a royal variety of host. And I was immediately penitent and in the simplest English, but he did not understand.

I never knew what my Spanish neighbor said in my defence—she said so much and with so graceful a vehemence, patting my hand the while. But I am sure that what she said was kind. And the legend of the Moor and the man and the peach again recurred to me.

At last, through a great American diplomat and linguist, an elaborate

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explanation that satisfactorily explained was effected, and later, when making our adieus, I was cordially included in an invitation to dine with the minister and his family on the very next Sunday.

We left the ball early, very early in the morning—but most of the others remained to breakfast in the garden. It was only on leaving that I was made to understand that adieus, with handshakes, must not be stinted at a Mexican party but made to each guest, while all the others frankly stare.

It will be quite impossible to forget that long white and gold room with the blaze of lights at each end, the corners deep and black with chaperones.

But those nice ladies with the

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bright eyes and the soft voices—they did not embrace me after the fashion of the stage-parent and swiftly kiss me on cheeks and forehead—that was my first appearance. I was very sorry. It was such a pretty and dramatic ceremony. The floor near the native musicians was bright with young men and maidens, embarrassingly observant and who would, I very well knew, construe any mistake of mine as a national, not an individual, blunder. Oh! why should I say goodbye to any of them? Why shouldn't I turn and flee?

The next time, for I have vowed the vow, I shall certainly remain to breakfast—aye! to luncheon, to dinner! Then shall I honorably escape

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an excess of farewells in the first person.

Very unfortunately, the Sunday dinner invitation had to be regretted. But later on there came an entire day in this country home, with the minister's charming but non-English speaking wife and his merry daughters.

They were very pretty women and daintily bred—they usually wore silken Vienna-made frocks—and each impressed us as an ideal hostess. Yet, inconsistently enough, they made no mention whatever of any progressive game or guessing contest, with cut-glass and sterling silver prizes. It was quite ridiculous, to be sure! How could we consider ourselves

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properly entertained? But Mexican society is still shockingly primitive—they simply do not know how to get bored.

Immediately on our arrival that day (after the dogs had barked and after we had passed in grand review before three generations of servants), we had wine and French cakes in the salon and a distressingly long pow-wow in Spanish—and oh! so elaborate, so mellifluous, that the mere thought of the dialect of Posey County and the Bowery was a positive refreshment.

Then there was an hour or more of Schumann and Grieg and Chopin (but no "rag-time") interpreted by a native daughter of the republic just back from her finishing-school in

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Germany. And after that we were given an opportunity to admire some boarding-school drawings and hand-paintings and bits of needle-work.

But most of that delightful day was spent in the green twilight of the dear old garden, a pleasure-garden of exceptional beauty planned by a Spanish nobleman of taste and wealth two hundred years before.

It was old and shady and sweet-smelling, it was not too trim; it was—— But a description of its artistic values would be quite impossible.

There were about forty acres in the high-walled inclosure and, along the broad walks and under the great, strange trees that arched high above, were enchanting tangles of dreadfully rare shrubs and flowers.

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At the far end were the ruined baths—the mossy arches draped with rose-vines; and then there were grottoes and fountains with summer-houses and a bowling-alley. And, at the intersection of several shady paths, there was a shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was a lovely, moss-grown ruin and suggestive of a very great deal of poetry. Yet I found I would have preferred a sun-dial.

It seemed a sin to chatter under those mighty trees and in that great and meaningful stillness. And the tender green gloom, the great and eloquent peace inspired such a lofty sort of abstraction,—then finally a pleasing melancholy.

Our hostess, as in due time she led the way to the dining-room of

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the villa, made a long speech in Spanish—supplemented by her daughters in a sprightly chorus of French and German and English. I was personally obliged for the English (when you get as far as irregular verbs, all the other languages are such a bore!) and pained extremely to learn that the cook-lady of the household, having attended a fiesta in the city, was already several days behind schedule time. They did not wait luncheon for her, which was wisdom.

This was not an isolated case. We chanced upon a number of rich unfortunates whose maid-servants and man-servants frequently mixed potions with their pulque that made them forgetful of common little

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things like Time and Duty. If one has vast sympathy for the down-trodden and distressed, and is skilled in the ethics of consolation, she certainly should abide in Mexico and give ear to the jeremiads of the Mexican housewife with a house swarming with servants. She is not needed here in the States—where one can if necessary live peacefully at study-clubs and receptions and matinées, feeding at a restaurant and taking refuge at night in a flat or a private hotel. If I were a Mexican lady I would pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe all the way up the Street of Degradation to send me an accomplished cook, one who eschewed bull-fights and fiestas and family funerals. If

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she didn't come, I would in my despair either plunge from the cathedral tower or buy a cook-book.

The mantilla of the minister's chief cook had fallen temporarily upon young sub-cooks of habits more certain but reputedly less talent; and the gentle hostess, who understood that Americans generally lunched on fried pork and ice-water and buckwheat-cakes, did fear that her guests would find nothing suited to their tastes. But she looked encouraged after the third course.

So the luncheon we had that day was of necessity extremely simple. There were really but eight courses and we sat at table hardly an hour and a half.

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Down there not even the peons have to bother about the circling flight of time and the simple luncheons or breakfasts (they are a composite of French, Spanish, Italian and native cooking) sometimes make a Yankee apprehensively yearn for plain bread and cheese and applesauce. Or a digestive apparatus run by electricity.

In spite of the dreaming in that poetic garden on the other side of the patio it must be recorded the gringo portion of that luncheon disappeared in a manner quite disheartening to a lazy cook. But then we were always disgracefully hungry in Mexico—hungry as peons, and our appetites could not be twisted into compliments to any cook-lady.

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Here, for the curious, is set down a true and faithful copy of the menu from my notes, which were scribbled that evening when we had returned to the hotel, in a deluge of rain—our umbrella a parasol of white silk and chiffon!

Rice Soup.

Spiced Rice.

Sardines. Eggs scrambled with tomatoes.

Mutton Chops.

Summer-squash chopped and fried with chilis and tomatoes.

Roast Pork.

Boiled Potatoes. French Bread.

Fried Brussels Sprouts, green Chili sauce.

Frijoles.

Dulces. French Cakes.

Three Wines. Beer.

Two bottles of Distilled Water.

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Extremely simple, yet I encouragingly sent my profound regards to the little sub-cooks when the frijoles were taken away; but, with an absolutely fine consideration, I withheld the private opinion that promotions in the kitchen were in order and the return of the chief cook a matter of merited indifference. For I discerned that the fastidious young ladies of the household could not be induced to eat of the pottage prepared by the humble amateurs—and they had never heard of cooking-schools and chafing-dish clubs.

Then, sauntering about in the patio, we discovered an ancient stone staircase, which we climbed half timidly only to find ourselves on a charming *azotea*, shaded by the tops

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of the patio-trees. Then we strolled out into the dreamy old garden again, to a summer-house near the big fountain, and there we had fruit and coffee and listened to the legends of hidden treasure and ghosts.

I much preferred the ghosts, with the old bowling-alley and ruined summer-house for a background. If that vine-clad old place was not really haunted, it was merely because Mexican ghosts lacked the proper artistic perception.

The cool, violet-scented air tossed gently the greenery which rioted along the mossy, yellow wall of the garden and the shadows slowly grew longer and longer. The old villa gleamed and shimmered like a pearl through the trees. Every one was

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in a placid, gracious mood and in harmony with the spirit of the garden.

Was it really a dream, an enchantment? Would I wake up elsewhere and be compelled to look always upon terra-cotta houses, each boasting thirteen styles of architecture and flanked by nasturtiums and magenta petunias?

Then was I saddened.

But after a little while, as I was stirring my coffee and grudgingly paying conversational tribute, I discovered there was an illusion to enjoy. I kept very still, and, in the green gloom of the distant paths, I began to espy wraiths of certain beautiful ladies and brave lords;—they once meandered over the pages

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of old Spanish romances and Italian ballads—they once lived and tragically died, most of them, in old-time dramas.

I gazed dreamily and not too direct, so they strolled quite near after a time,—plucking roses and jasmine sprays; they stood at the fountain's edge, with clasped hands and glance exceeding tender.

The farewells, I observed, took place at the little old blue and yellow shrine. (One of the tiles now does acceptable service on my writing-desk as a paper-weight. Explanatively, the youngest daughter of the household did pluck it out for me and did wash it in the waters of the fountain—and I accepted it greedily.)

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Their happy laughter and their extravagant protestations and their reluctant farewells I distinctly saw but heard not; for, alas! in the sun, those fine ladies in soft brocades and agleam with jewels cast no shade. Neither did their cavaliers, so handsome in doublet and hose, with velvet Romeo cloaks and plumed caps and dangling rapiers.

Ah, yes! while I had to make a long pretence of sipping black, syrupy coffee and while the others were eating blue figs and merrily punning in four languages, I distinctly beheld—trooping up and down those mossy garden-paths right before us—such dainty ladies and such decorative lords of the picturesque long ago!

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But no more shall I see them. That venerable garden, with its tropic vines and shrubs, with its Sleeping-Beauty tangle of rose-trees and strange lilies, is modernized now; it has been "cleaned up." Alas! and alas! it is lighted by electricity.

There is a sadness, a not-to-be-assuaged sorrow about such a change.

But of my day in that old Mexican garden I am resolved to cherish only an unmarred recollection, and, so long as I shall wander by "Time's runaway river," it is to be one of my great and unchanging joys—a beautiful memory ineffaceable.

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A Street Ramble

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A STREET RAMBLE

Why is it that one never so forcefully realizes as on the day after a big party that this life is not a dazzling little cluster of ecstacies?

That morning after the S—— minister's really charming ball out at his country-house, the atmosphere seemed surcharged with unamiability and general infelicities; for each of us had fallen out of love with Life, dear Life.

I myself was infinitely melancholy and suspicioned that I was doomed to death by hanging in the imme-

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diate future; moreover, I was confident that no one on all the earth or the seas cared.

It was of course the direct result of the menu of the Mexican party-supper, an institution that would induce acutest melancholy in an ostrich. One a week produces a pessimist; two, a misanthrope; and three — no gringo ever survives three. But at that hour our melancholy eluded analysis.

Immediately after bread-and-chocolate that morning, it was noon by the tenor bell on the old Church of the Profesa, and, to dispel the mental miasma that was ours, we all amicably agreed and heroically upon a long tramp about the streets of the city.

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It was on the way down to the Alameda that we stopped to enthuse, experimentally, over the old Porcelain Palace and to hear the legend of the builder.

He was a young man, a too gay young man, of the eighteenth century, and he squandered all his substance in riotous living. Then, so they tell the tale, he went to his father for funds, but that gentleman turned him away with a disagreeable Spanish proverb about shocking spendthrifts and their inability to ever build "porcelain palaces."

And the proud young man repented of his empty money-bags and his evil ways — he reformed and speedily amassed a great fortune. The legend is minus the method,

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but pirates and brigands were the quick-rich of that period. Then, to prove that his father was a false prophet, the young man built this quaint palace of blue and white tiles. It is one of the sights of modern Mexico.

We next halted at the Hotel Jardin, which was once a convent of the rich and terribly powerful order of San Francisco. Their splendid buildings once covered fifteen acres of the city's heart, but Comonfort cut a street through them. (No good Catholic will walk on that street yet, so they say.)

My purpose was a little pilgrimage to the balcony-rail on the other side of which part of that prose-idyl,

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"A White Umbrella in Mexico," was written. I picked my way between the puddles and the mossy flower-pots of the old patio garden, beautiful and miasmatic. I located the balcony-rail and got a snap-shot just as the sun dodged under a cloud. Too late, I unearthed the fact that I had a friend whose friend's friend knew the present occupant of the F. Hopkinson Smith suite and Mr. Moon of Zacatécas!

As we processioned along a narrow, cobbled street, where the smell of old pulque made one homesick for Chinatown, we stopped to gaze in at the den of a charcoal-seller. With its velvet, midnight shadows, there was no opening but the one door,

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—with the really delightful pottery on the blackened walls its only high-light, the den would certainly have turned the brain of a Rembrandt. Near the doorway, bepowdered and begrimed with the glittering, black dust, and surrounded by sacks and baskets of the charcoal — squatted the almost naked wife and children. They would have been a revelation in make-up to a burnt-cork artiste—yet only a degenerate would regard with anything but deep, deep compassion such wretched human beings. There are varieties of picturesquenesses,—this sort made us ill and unhappy.

Then we determinedly tramped

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around and around in the beautiful greenwood called the Alameda, past the place where not so very long ago they burned all the heretics.

And then along the Paseo as far as the *glorieta* of the statue of Guatemozin, the last emperor of the Aztecs. Regardless of nationality, one's heart beats high with pride at the memory of the spirit, the courage of this ancient hero. The statue, reared by the descendants of his enemies, is a noble one, and the bas-relief panel representing the torture by fire of the royal captive justly entitled to one-third of an afternoon.

It is not surprising that the Conqueror did not rest well at night; Gautemozin's farewell, for one thing,

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must have etched itself in his brain. And such little etchings murder sleep.

Retracing our steps, we were frequently besieged by young beggar-ladies, the descendants perhaps of some of the old caciques. Who knows? And who possessed of a copper would resist the entreaty of the soft, mournful eyes, the low music of the appeal?

"Little lady, for the love of Sacred Mary, give me a cent, a little cent!" "Give me a cent, for the love of God, young lady! Young lady!"

Alas! the velvet of the little voice wears away with maturity.

That was the afternoon I discovered the most charming house in Mexico City. It was hardly big

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enough for a palace, but its dignity and its unique beauty, tinged with an unmistakable little air of romance and the sadness of decay, immediately won my heart.

Dainty vines had climbed from the inner court, over the roof, to fall in cascades of greenery over the front—which was pink and faded to a tone most delightsome.

There were, alas! no señoritas in any of the balconies nor at any of the grated French windows, but there was an impressive *portéro* on guard at the front doorway—through which a couple of furniture vans could swagger without accident.

The mighty doors were heavily panelled and studded with iron and, in the years gone by, may well

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have added to the owner's mental peace, when robbers and assassins knocked and whenever there happened to be a political revolution.

Through the passageway there was a glimpse of the patio-garden, with its jungle of bananas and palms, its fountain and two haughty peacocks mincing along the tiled walk.

Over the street entrance swung an immense lantern, from a charmingly wrought iron bracket; of course it had not been lighted in perhaps twenty years—it was dimmed and corroded delightfully.

And then, on one side of the big, mediæval-looking doors, was the best old knocker it has ever been my wretched lot to covet. It was

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never the least trouble to walk five blocks out of the way, even in mud and in rain, to see that knocker.

We tramped gloomily along the pavements of the Main Causeway, passed the very spot of Alvarado's Leap and the Church of the Martyrs, with its time-scarred tablet,—a memorial to those who fell to a terrible death on that sad night so long ago.

We muse pessimistically on the fate of all nations and many individuals; for we could perceive that the whole world was very wretched and that there was joy in nothing.

We waved our hand at a yellow street-car driver, tooting a mournful

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tin horn, and with him we journeyed out to Popotla.

There we viewed the poor old rag of a cypress-tree under which, one rainy night, three hundred and eighty years ago, Mr. Hernando Cortes spent a very bad half hour.

By the time we reached the historic spot, a fine and melancholy rain had very appropriately set in. We could the more fully sympathize with the great general.

But it took us only a scant ten minutes.

After a time, the rain had ceased in order to display a gorgeously crimsoned west, we found ourselves in the gloomy little national cemetery near the Alameda.

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The care-taker, who had fought with the great Juarez, accompanied us about and proudly discoursed on certain of the illustrious dead. Most of them departed this life by special request.

This was my first Mexican cemetery. It was very different from the little burying-ground on the hillside in my native village, but it was no less suggestive of the Great Peace of Death, the Complete Consolation. The high wall about the inclosure was scarred and discolored by Time, and it made a shadow quite as mournful as the regulation cypress or willow.

In this wall were many cells, each one occupied for a term of years by a dead tenant; if, at the

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end of that time, it was cheerily explained to us, the rent of the narrow house is not forthcoming in advance, the tenant is ejected and annihilated by the sexton. The merry old fellow showed us the fragments of some poor Yorick who had that day been found in arrears; on the morrow, he was to be unceremoniously mixed forever with the elements.

The grandees are permanently buried.

The old sexton (I had seen him before—when he was digging the grave of Ophelia) paused and orated at the tombs of Saragossa, Comonfort, Guerrero and Maximilian's Mejia. But he did not break their sleep; none of them, not one, rose

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up to bow thanks or to contradict. The sexton lived a unique dream-life and, considering the environment, he was strangely cheerful; there seemed no heaviness whatever under his mirth. He exulted in the companionship of the mighty dead, he lived over again each day his martial youth and was merry.

Recalling that day when Maximilian and his followers were disposed of, he hopped ecstatically about and impersonated each in turn so cleverly that the scene was really there before us.

The unfortunate Maximilian at his hands received the credit of entire calmness—he silently laid his hand upon his heart; and Miramon, who stood in the center of the group,

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nonchalantly curled his mustache. But poor Mejia, valiant enough, so the old man assured us,—when facing an earthly danger, shook just like a man with the palsy.

The sexton's enjoyment of the rehearsal of this historic tragedy and his greatest memory was beautiful to see.

At one side and half-hidden by the trumpery tin and bead garlands of his adoring countrymen, was the mausoleum of the one-time fierce Juarez. He sleeps very quietly now, in the dim light of the old cemetery, the damp air heavy with the scent of roses and violets. Above the tomb is the famous marble figure of this modern Aztec hero, with his weary head resting in the lap of Mexico.

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We enthused over its great beauty very satisfactorily indeed for Americans, and so he who had proudly marched under the banner of the great Juarez bent his poor old back and, with infinite care, selected for us certain of the cut flowers at the foot of the tomb. And of this mark of high favor, such a particularly fine appreciation was shown that we were all urged to come again and at any time. Furthermore, we might bring our detested cameras inside the gates!

But none of our friends ever credited that report.

A few more short days and then will come the low-voiced messenger with the order for that merry little sexton to take possession of his own

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narrow house in that quiet village. Only a little folding of his hands to sleep, a little slumber,—then in the Unknown Country he will be the equal of Mexico's greatest and mightiest and the comrade of even his revered Juarez.

May his last hour here hold only calmness.

When the gates had clanged behind us and we were once again under the broad sky and in the midst of the busy streets, then suddenly did all the sad and wretched earth seem sweet and dear,—with a great rush our desire for life returned to us—we forgot the disgusts, we remembered only our admirations. In the soft dusk, with the

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the yellow street-lights appearing and with the many sounds of a city-life to encourage us, we no longer were wearied pessimists—we once again were brave and cheerful.

What to us then were Death and his great mysteries? And an old cemetery of dead enmities and dead loves and dead ambitions? It was glorious to breathe in so good and beautiful a world, and to look up at the stars and to continue indefinitely the pursuit of favorite phantoms.

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Personal and Reminiscent

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PERSONAL AND REMINISCENT

It is disconcerting to a self-respecting and properly ambitious American to journey to a far country and, after a sojourn of whole weeks, to discover his inability to perfectly understand a people,—their civilization, their aims, their inevitable destiny.

Treatises on America and its numerous tribes are compiled in a few hours by mere French and English persons speeding across the country and as they nonchalantly glance from the car-windows. They elude the comic weeklies, they get

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put into thick books and become standard, eventually forcing Americans into one of the great international societies for Mutual Depreciation.

But such brilliance failed to inspire me; it goaded me into a miserable, an envious gloom,—for Mexico was reticent with me. All her motives and intents, every heartache and each detail of her destiny she refused to uncover beneath the little electric glare of my intellect. I scorned to insist and pride prevented an expostulation. But I grieved much.

And then I forgot all about it, the dear old City of Mexico proved so enchanting; there was on every side such an infinity of things bliss-

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ful and dear to charm me. Why try to understand any of them?

It was good to forget for a time the subtleties and complexities of an up-to-date civilization; and, except the street-cars and the telegraph-pole processions, there was nothing in all those strange, bright streets to remind me of a sober, work-a-day world.

Mexico is a great enchantress. She speedily transformed me from a dreary-thoughted slave into a fearless and ambitionless idler; and she left me never a depressing memory of my former state.

I forgot, in the tranquillity of that metamorphosis, all dissonances and disquietness; I gained the courage for present happiness; I dreamed

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and idled away the days precisely as though life knew no bitternesses and glooms. Nor distressingly great activities.

Then, when I wandered joyously about the market-places, gradually possessing myself of such rich earthly treasure as rainbow pottery, scraps of altar brocades (a trifle faded and worn, perhaps), old rosaries and worm-eaten books (bound in parchment by some Friar Jerome and yellowed exquisitely by Time),—even until the little mozo could carry no more—until I myself had left neither one copper cent nor a finger on which to hang another rosary or pulque-jug;—

When I tiptoed into some gray old church for a somber reverie and

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where the orange-colored candle-flame revealed black-robed Fiamettas and Catherines and Carmens confessing their sins of the week to stern-visaged priests, who sat motionless as statues within the open confessionals;—

When I gleefully exchanged copper coin of the realm for sticky, very pink dulces and shared them with my devoted little friends of the fleeting hour;—

When I sat myself down on some mossy stone bench and made myself believe I was one of the barefooted masses, ragged, unwashed—my one possible supper an uncertain share in the family dish of frijoles;—

When I in a "blue" carriage (with a fat, swarthy man on the box, in

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a dazzling zarape and a tremendous hat of black beaver and silver passementerie) arrived at the gates, where, in the early starlight, were crowded the sad-faced poor to catch a glimpse of some great fête—and as I (this was such a pleasing, royal fancy) directed my slaves to throw handfuls of gold among the hungry-eyed populace;—

Who was unkind and rose up with scornful finger to disturb my dreamings and to remind me that in reality I was a joyless, American drudge, an unconsidered unit of a utilitarian, an avaricious mass? A representative of a purely mechanical civilization and of a nation of bosses and trusts and automatic art?

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On the Viga Canal

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Of course I was sub-conscious all the time of my nationality and the dreadful other things; yet, in my little vacation-world of romancing and make-believe, I was quite too generous to accent any such personal superiority or good-fortune.

So, while I wandered and listened and wondered, I really made no pretence of understanding Mexico nor her mode of enchantment; and while I promptly admitted her charms, I refused to dissect them. Those sadly analytic people who explain so much and who can tell why a little child likes bright red and why one is joyous on a day in springtime, are a positive menace to sanity in an age too replete with disillusions.

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It is possible to wholly forget that life is duty, in that enchanting dream-country commonly spoken of as Mexico; and, with periodic bundles of books and papers from the States, to forever luxuriate in ideally tumbled-down, Italianesque villas; where, in the middle distances, bright beings effectively group themselves and where good natured little maids come at the clap of the hand, and unclose your eyes, when you feel equal to the fatigue of gazing out at the noon sunlight. This, in the golden land of the Montezumas, is an idyl and not in the least shiftless and disgraceful.

Ah, yes! I might have been content to have dreamed away one life-time down in Mexico somewhere,

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but it was not practicable and alas! dreaming does not seem to be my destiny.

But then, as the discomfited fox suspected that certain grapes were sour, so am I inclined to suspect that my permanent Mexican content would have proved a misleading variety. Principally because.

And then what American-bred young woman would unprotestingly live in a country where there are neither matinée clubs, nor women's parliaments, nor bicycle teas, nor pre-Raphaelite art societies, nor golf tournaments, nor lovely Maeterlinck circles?

The Woman of Mexico is serenely happy. She doesn't work—all her

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male kinfolks assure her it isn't lady-like. She is calm, she is sweet and she is distractingly picturesque —when she wears her very own clothes and headgear. And she has the good taste to avoid morbid self-scrutiny and idle self-culture.

We of the States may gaze at our Mexican neighbor and covet all too vainly the serene, lily-of-the-field leisure apparently hers forever; but, if we are not quite too superior, we can be terribly avenged. We can keep the shirt-waist and sailor-hat in vogue—they are absolutely fatal to the feminine loveliness of Mexico, so much vaunted. One searches wearily for the typical Mexican beauty in the fashionable crowds driving on the Paseo or shopping on

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San Francisco Street. But some late afternoon you discover her as she comes from confession, in a soft, black gown and with the black rebozo draped coquettishly and discreetly. She flits by, self-conscious as a school miss—you catch a flash of fine, dark eyes, and, dropping your manners, you turn to stare adoringly after her.

Oh, dear! she too looks around—to see the details of your gown in the back!

The Mexican man is admirable. Hardly as nice as Kinelm Chillingly or any of those other grandiloquent old prigs of course, yet still adorable.

In this era even the unreasonable spinsters admit that there should be

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plenty of nice men in every well-regulated community and landscape. They are so decorative or so useful.

The Men of Mexico are really quite as terrible as an army with banners, when you happen to be in one of your sixteenth-century moods —you forget all about Walter Raleigh and Charles Grandison. For they are such picturesque composites of heroic old Aztec caciques (they, I understand, were very admirable) and of daring Spanish explorers and lordlings and of gay and graceful French counts and lots of such people as you once met everywhere between book-covers.

But then, moods vary and there are times—no matter what the landscape—when one really appreciates

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conversation with a man whose idea of Woman is never for one little minute according to Schopenhauer. Then sometimes, and a great deal depends upon the background, it is exquisite to listen to unhurried and very involved compliments, such as men with a touch of latinity know best how to compose—and to speculate all the time how very horrified the framers thereof would be, could they only read your Philistine thoughts as you dutifully smile and smile like a pleased saw-dust doll.

Mexican men are agile and handsome—usually in a small and unimpressive way—and they have a great deal of beautiful manner, and they are always extremely decorative. But I do wish their ball-clothes still in-

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cluded slashed jackets with silver buttons and large, tinkling spurs and daggers with magic hieroglyphs on the blade.

To them American women are but riddles and American men unpainted savages.

It is not, I am quite sure, the dearth of elevators and pie and soda-fountains and hot breads and ice-water and telephones that makes all American-bred young women doubtful as to their permanent contentment in a glorious country like Mexico.

Is it the absence of civilized, educated men who know how to talk and to not talk to the fairly intelligent and self-respecting human beings that happen to be feminine?

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In the way of a little personal confession and an unwilling one, I myself had been so absorbed in my dreamings and my bargainings in the Thieves' Market that I had quite forgotten to compare the Mexic and American type of Man.

But one day, in the thick of a gorgeous Mexican crowd, this disgraceful mental lapse promptly ended. For it there happened that I beheld two tall men (I just knew they were Americans) collide with great force and each other. Miraculously, it was not a total wreck. I paused in amazement. Then great and very distinctly spontaneous was my joy, when I heard those two men exclaim in perfectly lovely nineteenth-century English:

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"Great Caesar's Ghost! What are you doing down in this neck of woods?"

"Well, God bless my old soul! I'm glad to see you! Shake!"

Now this was not spectacular, and it was not exquisitely picturesque like the other Mexican street-greetings, yet it directly appealed to me and made me think about things.

It is in Mexico inelegant for even a servant to hurry, and so, as I sauntered by with extreme nonchalance and an unshed tear of sympathy, I easily discerned that those big aliens were mighty homesick. But they knew it not, and, in their blindness, what could they do but just blame the infernal country? And then as I walked on and

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grieved over their sinful inappreciation of the goodly land (they said it was musty and God-forsaken), I was made to recall anew the brusqueness and the deep good-nature and the beautiful sincerity of the masculine type of the dear and far country of which I had dreamed at night.

It was near the Alameda that I detected in the rainbow crowd a man hustling his little daughter along in the real American style, dragging her through so much that amazed her, so much that made her wide-eyed. It was perfectly apparent that he was an American, a man of purpose and not too much poetry, and even before he half turned and, in the thick of that Mexican babel,

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shouted unto her thus: "Come on, kid—come on! come on! Here! give that old tramp two-bits. Now, come along!"

I am sure I cannot tell why this conspicuous haste and this additional bit of nineteenth-century English quite enchanted me; but I discovered that I yearned to shake that big man by the paw,—that I wanted to hunt up an ice-cream soda for the little daughter.

But, again bowing to wretched conventionalism even in a strange land, I sadly meandered past my fellow-citizen, who, I observed, again broke schedule time, at the command of the small girl, to buy out an old coral-bead woman.

That man was from our own

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magnificent West—of that I was sure. His were the lines about the eyes and mouth that come to him and who knows life in the open country, unfenced, untrammeled,—and who, far from the chattering crowds, turns his face to the sunset and thinks quietly. Oh! what a lot of things we could have talked about (in English!) down there in Mexico, even in just fifteen minutes!

He could have told me the war-news and of the last flop of the foreign powers and of some startling invention and of split-ups in Congress and of some brand-new book in the millionth edition! He might have lacked graceful hand flourishes and pretty bows and light-

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ning-change facial expressions, but (I'll wager every ancient idol I got out at the Pyramid of the Sun one perfect day) he would have talked to me as to a rational member of the species.

And so I have indulged the hope that those three Yankees of that afternoon walk did not tarry long in our sister republic. For nice American men sometimes deteriorate in Mexico, and, in process of time, come to look upon their sister's place in American society as quite too exalted. Some of them announce their entire willingness to shut her up in dizzy towers and convents, or to hire an old woman to watch her when she goes to prayer-meeting or to buy darning-cotton. Some men

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forget that a nation cannot rise higher than its mothers.

But Mexico. Wherever I wandered, Mexico proved herself so direct in sympathy and so resourceful. For every gray moment, she gave me a whole hour of rose-color.

If I failed to see the Southern Cross, I at least was so happy as to behold trees decorated with great bunches of intensely scarlet orchids. If the volcanoes did persistently swathe their heads in chiffon veils of gray cloud; if the yellow fever did detain us this side of the *tierra caliente*, I could count unexpected favors in the way of Murillos and Van Dyckes and Guido Renis and

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Teniers the Elder—and adventuresome jaunts to little story-book towns with names so Aztec and histories so thrilling as to petrify with many an amazement.

If I walked three miles with two cameras and then found the sun on the wrong side of the street, I was sure on my way back to chance upon some old-time palace or church or fountain that was simply unforgetable.

If my friends in the States forgot my existence and wrote me no letters I had only to go out into the highways and compensate myself discovering their Mexican doubles. I found many of them, for there are but a few distinct types and I suppose they are universal, nation-

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ality and environment being so largely an accident.

If it rained pitchforks, when I had planned to stroll and to listen to the boom and the shiver of the mighty Santa Maria Guadalupe, or to hear the band play to the masses in the moonlit Zocalo—with the great Cathedral and the National Palace looking like piles of purest marble in the white radiance,—I merely rubbed my ring and awaited developments.

Results varied, but the genie unfailingly appeared.

And then, one soulless day, I was made to realize that in order to prevent serious planetary disturbances and a shut-down of the whole

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economic machinery of America, I must be in a certain corner of the United States within just five days. It was unspeakably dreadful, but I roused me from the lethargy that was a delight and was glad that the utmost haste was required of me.

There never would have been time in this life for goodbyes to my Mexico.

It all seemed so dear and so familiar to me.

How could I ever leave all those fascinating market scenes and the lovely old churches with flying buttresses and weeds blossoming high on the roofs?

Then there was that princely garden with the peacocks, where I had so often loitered, waiting for a

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Rosetti or a Burne-Jones damsel who never appeared.

Could my fine, æsthetic nature ever again endure to be awakened early in the morning by aught save the pleasant music of the bells on the old church of the Profesa? I realized there would be infinite and unlovely tests.

And then, always and ever, it would be oh! for a breath of gardenias fresh from the hot lands! And violets from near the Hill of the Star!

There was my view from the old cathedral-tower, with the snail-shell stairway and the giant bells—and, far below—the thick, bright crowds, with the music, the color, the sunlight.

Far to the north, out near the

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maguey-plantations, bloomed Nature's own gardens for the little peon women and children—acres of wild pink cosmos and long stretches, big patches, strips and dots of scarlet, of blue and of orange. I could never forget those brown, gentle people and those miles and miles of flowers.

Yes, Mexico, my Mexico, had been very rich in loveliness.

Travelers have long told us the tale that Mexico, the land of amazing contrasts, is the most picturesque country under the sun—and now I have some little reason to believe that this is truth.

In the still of many summer noons to come, I know I shall dream much,

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grieving and rejoicing, about this beautiful neighbor of ours with the tragic history, — the goodly place where no one is in an unseemly haste and where unconcern for life's exigencies is in inverse ratio to the need.

And sometimes, to the poor American pilgrim, jaded with many anxieties, with many ambitions, that beautiful unconcern is a wondrous tonic. He has rushed through the years quite too contemptuous of the Ideal Existence according to certain old Greeks who knew all about it and of modern Mexicans who now know. Really, in these days the ant should occasionally go to the sluggard and she should consider his ways and be wise.

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Poverty in rags, against a pink background of crumbling wall and with a hedge of aloe, a tangle of tropic greenery and mossy church-domes in the purple distance, seems to fascinate some people in a degree extraordinary.

But just let the wretched beggars be decently clothed, freshen the wall with whitewash, cut down the weeds, stretch a barbed-wire fence and cover the shaky old church with shingles or corrugated-iron—and those very people promptly cease their rhapsodizings and grieve in a way quite incomprehensible to the million.

Yet am I, I here shamelessly and impenitently confess it, one of the mourning incomprehensibles—one of

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those who only with reluctance will acknowledge that Poetry is really a poor and forsaken old thing. Or just a legend.

But Progress, this great, blatant march—though there be many notes harsh and discordant—must really not I suppose be regretted nor held in disesteem; for we have many times assured our unhappy selves that Progress means many splendid things, such as a sturdier lower class, an enlightened, a well-fed one.

Nevertheless, the unfortunates who have all along suspected that for Commerce and Industry must we everywhere forego Beauty and Poetry will shortly languish. They will mourn anew and of all creatures be

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the most dejected and wretched. For Mexico, the serene land where unreproached many hitherto did spend in pleasant dreamings their little hour ere they were hurried elsewhere, has at last been entered by the enemy. The shout of the vandal has already gone up. His ax and his pick are never silent now; his bucket of blue whitewash is as inexhaustible as the sea.

The years are relentless, and they will bring many changes and all those nerve-wrecking things known to us poor moderns as Advantages. Will Mexico be happier then? And better? Or merely less lovely?

One can learn vastly important things down there in Mexico. I

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learned that to idle by the wayside was as good as to try to get as much money as Hetty Green and that to tranquilly dream epics and lyrics (principally lyrics) was as good as to be as mentally restless as a Corliss engine.

Ah! surely it was only when America was younger and less comfortable that it was right to lead a life of such furious industry—to look upon Pleasure only as a heresy.

So I did strike my breast and cry Alack! when, in the Land of the Noontide Calm, I heard that penetrating voice of Dame Duty; and, with all those tender farewells of mine unsaid, with memories of many marvelous things and with a

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readjusted Theory of Averages, I turned and came again into my own country.

THE END

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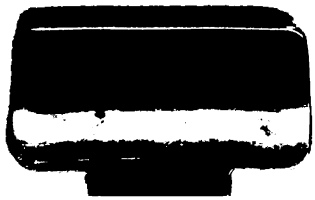

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